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VICTORIA CHALAYA

[Victoria Chalaya](#) has been entertaining people for quite some time. Before coming to Los Angeles to try her hand at acting, she had already sang, danced and modeled professionally in Saint-Petersburg, Russia. Soon after moving to California, she started to get bit parts in movies like "Fat Albert," "Meet the Fockers," and "Christmas with the Kranks." More recently, Victoria appeared in Amy Heckerling's new movie "I Could Never Be Your Woman" with Michelle Pfeiffer and "Mini's First Time" with Nikki Reed. She's also a model for "Duff Stuff" and "Generic." Victoria talks about some of her experiences, shares advice for hopeful actresses and explains why she had to get accustomed to friendly strangers in America as this month's Polly Pinup.

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GIRL ON FIRE

CCF: You were born in Russia and actually had a childhood career as a singer and dancer under the name Tori Fire, is that right? At what age exactly did you start performing?

VC: Actually, before all of that I danced ballroom professionally for eight years. I started at the age of four, so as long as I can remember I have been on stage. But I started singing at 11 and did opera for two years, then pop for about three. It was an amazing time. I got to tour, have my own dance troop, band, and it was pretty hard work, considering that I had to rehearse, record and do appearances and go to school full time. Russia doesn't have home schooling programs.

CCF: When was it you decided to come to America and pursue an acting/modeling career?

VC: I came to the U.S. for the first time in the summer of 1998 with a group from my high school. We traveled the country for a bit, then I got to spend some time in Huntington Beach and I just fell in love with southern California, especially the weather. (LOL) So I graduated high school in 1999 and came to L.A. to go to UCLA where I studied film and TV. And since I use to model in Russia before, I knew exactly what to do and language was not a requirement, my first step was to get with a modeling agency here. And the agency actually got me my first acting part in Brian Katkin's "Shakedown."

CCF: Was it hard at all adjusting to our culture? Any big difference that really jumped out at you when you first arrived that you were not used to?

VC: Well, yes. The biggest difference is the smiling faces everywhere. Strangers on the street saying “Hi, How are you?” to each other. That is something I could not get used to for a long time because if a complete stranger ever smiles or especially starts talking to you in Russia the person is ether insane or is trying to mug you. (LOL) The second thing is that I can actually drive a car here without having a heart attack every five minutes. I’m still amazed when I go back to Russia and see my girlfriends drive out there. Cars driving on the sidewalk, honking at pedestrians like that don’t belong there. Oh, man it’s such an adrenaline rush every five seconds – that whole movie “Crank” could have been shot on the streets of Moscow. (LOL)

CCF: Which really drives you - the acting or the modeling?

VC: Modeling is a great and relatively easy way to make money, but acting is so much more challenging and exiting that I have to say I’m more focused on acting.



CCF: You were in the new Amy Heckerling movie “I Could Never Be Your Woman” with Michelle Pfeiffer and Jon Lovitz. Tell me about that whole experience.

VC: Jon who plays Michelle’s ex-husband is a great comedian and his ability to improvise is fascinating. I think the best takes were all improv and those made the final cut. I play his new very pregnant wife, who is not amused with his silly behavior. So I got to wear a belly suit, and experience back pains. (LOL) For the first few days Michelle thought that I was pregnant for real, so one day Amy come up to me and started punching me in the stomach as a joke, I will never forget Michelle’s shocked face, wide open eyes, and very emotional: “Please tell me its not real?” So, it was a great experience to get to work with such a talented cast, and of course Amy, who did an amazing job directing.

CCF: Did you get to party with Jon Lovitz any off set? (LOL)

VC: Jon is as just as much of a goofball away from the camera. We were constantly laughing even in between takes. I hope we get to work together again.

CCF: And you were in Nikki Reed's new movie - "Mini's First Time." What was it like working with her?

VC: Nikki is probably one of the most spontaneous and open minded people I have ever met. She knows how to have fun doing what she loves, but at the same time still stays very professional and focused. That was another great experience for me.

CCF: Are you getting a little bit bigger roles than in the past? I know you have done a lot of unaccredited work like "Dodgeball," "Paparazzi" and "Art School Confidential," but does it look like things are starting to really pick up a little now?

VC: Well, as a lot of people say "You've got to start somewhere." But honestly I can't complain, I'm feeling like I am moving forward in my career and it's very exciting, but I know that I need to stay focused and perfect my craft. It's still just a beginning for me.

CCF: I read somewhere you are a current face of the clothing company "Duff." What does that consist of and how has that experience been?

VC: Oh, yes. I model for this great team of young designers there. I guess "the face of" just means that I'm one of their main models. (LOL) They have two clothing lines: "Duff Stuff" and "Generic." It's a very funky and trendy take on casual clothing. I love it!!! Actually check them out at www.simplygeneric.com

CCF: You were here in Vegas recently at the MAGIC Market Place. How did that go and did you get to enjoy the city any?

VC: MAGIC is the biggest fashion convention in the United States and it happens twice a year. I have been modeling for it for a couple of years now, but this year was my first time to work PROJECT, which is kind of like a branch of MAGIC, but it represents very trendy and new lines. It went so great, now all the designers that were at MAGIC the next time want to be at the PROJECT instead. I had a lot of fun, and the schedule of the convention usually allows you to enjoy the city at night. I'm not a gambler, so I enjoy the shows and of course clubs. One of the parties for the trade show was held at the Tryst inside the Wynn, and I think now that is my favorite club in Vegas.

CCF: You've been in a lot of big productions, both film and TV with appearances on "C.S.I.", "Las Vegas" and the "Big Love" and you've also got your modeling that you do. With all that you have going on, is being a part of indie productions like "Her Knight" just a thing of the past?

VC: You know, it's definitely great and every actor's dream is to make a good living doing what he/she loves. So of course in the beginning of our career we are going to give preference to bigger projects and better paying gigs. So

then when we can afford not to worry about our rent and bills, we can focus on finding the roles we love, that are very often smaller projects. I have such passion for filmmaking in general. That's why I went to film school. I love bold ideas and choices that indie filmmakers make and you very rarely see in major studio productions. For example, one of my favorite movies is Christopher Nolan's "Memento," which is definitely an art house film, and proves my point because there is pretty much nothing like that out there. So I'm always on the lookout for cool indie scripts.

CCF: And speaking of "Her Knight," it dealt with relationship issues, specifically the whole idea of people thinking they know what they want and what is best for them. I see this all the time where someone is stuck in this narrow view of their ideal mate and all the while they may very well be overlooking and in some cases not even giving the time of day to their possible soul mate. Any thoughts on that whole concept?

VC: You certainly bring up a great issue. All of us go through this at a certain point of our lives. We get so caught up in infatuation with someone, or in someone else's problems, that we completely forget that there is the whole world of people out there, who could be just as good or even better for us. It takes great will power to stand back and look at a relationship as an outsider to realize that it is just not working out, or its really not worth the energy to fight for something that is not going to live up to you expectation at the end. Or sometimes if you don't have the strength on your own like in "Her Knight," it takes a great person, not your partner, willing to stand by you and help you see and show you that you deserve better and sometimes you have to trust your instincts and take a chance on someone. Life is too short to miss out and "Her Knight" is a great story about that.



CCF: One of the reasons I love this time of year so much is Halloween. As far as I understand, that's not something traditionally celebrated in Russia. Do you celebrate Halloween at all and what are your thoughts on the whole thing?

VC: I love Halloween!! There is a similar religious holiday celebrated in Russia called "Maslenica," but the adults never participate, it's for kids only. I really like that it is such a big deal here, and so many people use there creativity to stand out. Don't get me wrong, I think there are some people that confuse weirdness with creativity, but we are all different, right? On the last Halloween I was the Julia Roberts character in "Pretty Woman." I could not find a costume,

so I made one myself. I think it turned out pretty good, since people had no trouble recognizing who I was supposed to be. (LOL)

CCF: Lastly, I just want to know if you have any advice for young girls that feel like acting or modeling is something they want to do in their future?

VC: I know it might sound cliché, but the biggest thing is really believing in yourself and not to get discouraged. If every actor or model that didn't get the job that they auditioned for got discouraged and gave up, we would have no entertainment industry. It's just that simple, its just part of the job. You have to stick with it since the success is much sweeter after the failure.

- CCF, November 2006

NOTE: If you would like to be one of Polly's Pinups, email jpgs and a brief bio to Pinups@pollystaffle.com. Work such as DVD screeners and CDs can be sent to Chad Freeman, P.O. Box 751992, Las Vegas, NV 89136-1992

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